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Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

Implementation Committee

Eighth meeting
Haparanda, Sweden, 23 and 24 May 2017

Report of the Implementation Committee on its eighth meeting

I. Attendance and organizational matters

1. The eighth meeting of the Implementation Committee under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held on 23 and 24 May 2017 in Haparanda, Sweden, at the invitation of the Finnish-Swedish Transboundary River Commission.

2. The following members of the Implementation Committee took part in the meeting: Vanya Grigorova; Kari Kinnunen; Johan Lammers; Stephen McCaffrey; Anne Schulte-Wülwer-Leidig; Attila Tanzi; Ivan Zavadsky; and Dinara Ziganshina.

3. Mr. Seppo Rekolainen, from the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, who had chaired the core group that had prepared the template for reporting under the Convention, attended the discussions relevant to the review of the template for reporting as an observer.

4. The Implementation Committee meeting was preceded by a seminar on the Water Convention and its Implementation Committee, which served, among others, to promote the Convention and the Committee.

5. The Implementation Committee adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2017/1.[1]

[1] Documents for the meeting are available on a dedicated web page of the Water Convention website: http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43598.

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II. Relevant activities under the Convention

6. The secretariat reported on the progress in the first pilot reporting under the Water Convention, also covering Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, which was further discussed at length in the context of the review of national implementation reports (see sect. IV below). Participants were also informed about the increased cooperation with international financial institutions in the framework of the work on water and climate change under the Convention, which currently focused on financial support for efforts related to adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins. The secretariat also provided details of two upcoming global workshops: the Global Workshop on Water Allocation (Geneva, 16-17 October 2017) to support efforts to develop sustainable and equitable transboundary arrangements on water allocation in the face of growing water scarcity and climate variability; and the Global Workshop on Climate Change Adaptation (Geneva, 11-12 December 2017), which would focus on water scarcity and droughts.

7. At its seventh meeting (Budapest, 1-2 December 2016), the Committee had considered that cooperation with international financial institutions was a strategic priority for its future work; it therefore welcomed the proposal by Mr. Zavadsky to reach out to the Green Climate Fund to promote the Committee.

III. Requests for advice, submissions and Committee initiative

8. The Committee noted that no requests for advice or submissions had been received since its seventh meeting, and reiterated its readiness to address such requests.

IV. Review of the national reports on the implementation of the Convention

9. At its seventh session (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015), the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention decided to establish a regular reporting mechanism, and to launch a pilot reporting exercise in 2016–2017 (ECE/MP/WAT/49/Add.2, decision VII/2). It also adopted a template for reporting (ibid., annex). As the reporting under the Convention was also intended as a means to review progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 6.5 with regards to transboundary water cooperation, at its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 18–19 October 2016), the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management agreed to revise the reporting template to include questions related to the calculation of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2016/2, forthcoming). In early 2017, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) wrote to all Parties, inviting them to report on the basis of the new template[2] by 15 May 2017.

10. On the basis of the reports received and the experience shared by Mr. Rekolainen in the preparation of the Finnish report, the Committee reviewed the template for reporting. The Committee expressed its general satisfaction with the template, which was considered to be comprehensive and clear overall. However, the Committee also regretted that the template did not always allow a critical analysis of the measures implemented compared with the existing water challenges. At the same time, the Committee recognized the need not to overburden countries with the reporting, and therefore to limit the information requested.

[2] Available on the web page for the meeting, http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43598.

11. The Committee emphasized that reporting should, above all, be a helpful exercise for countries to assess their situation, improve cooperation with their riparians and broadly communicate progress achieved and remaining challenges, including to the public, as underlined in decision VII/2 of the Meeting of the Parties on reporting under the Convention (see ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2). It therefore considered that some simple modifications to the template for reporting that could improve the overall readability of the individual country reports would best achieve the above objectives.

12. The Committee recommended that the following comments and proposals made at the meeting be reflected in possible future revisions of the reporting template:

(a) It was considered regrettable that the template was structured in a way that did not give sufficient prominence to the overall achievements in and remaining challenges to transboundary water cooperation. It was therefore suggested that the relevant questions now included in section IV be moved to the beginning of the template to provide an introduction and overview to the subsequent sections. It was hoped that that would also encourage Parties to elaborate more analytical and comprehensive answers to those questions, which tended to be disregarded in many of the reports;

(b) Another improvement for the readability of the reports could be achieved by moving section III, on the calculation of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2., to the beginning of the template, as it would provide at the onset an overview of the transboundary waters shared by the reporting country;

(c) The way the questions on the water uses were formulated under section II, item 2 (c), did not make it possible to determine whether all relevant water uses were included in the agreement;

(d) Also, owing to a lack of an overview of the main water uses in the basin under section II, question 2 (c), it was difficult to determine coherence with the answers provided under section II, question 2 (d), on the scope of agreements, and under section II, question 3 (e), on the tasks and activities of joint bodies;

(e) Water and health issues should be more prominent in the reporting template;

(f) Making more explicit reference to national authorities and agencies consulted in the question on the process of preparation of the reports (section IV, question 4, of the reporting template) might improve the quality of the replies;

(g) There seemed to be some problems in the Russian-language versions of certain questions, which should be addressed in future revisions of the template.

13. The Committee entrusted Mr. Lammers and Ms. Schulte-Wülwer-Leidig to follow up on the possible process of revision of the template on the Committee's behalf.

14. The Committee subsequently discussed the objectives and approaches of its analysis of the Parties' reports to be included in its report to the Meeting of the Parties. It agreed that it would focus on general achievements and challenges to implementation common to a number of Parties. It would not focus on individual Parties. The Committee also decided that it would propose a draft decision for possible adoption by the Meeting of the Parties with recommendations to enhance implementation of the Convention and reporting. Such recommendations might include possible activities to be carried out under the Convention.

15. The Committee agreed that its analysis of the reports would include their examination from the procedural point of view, for instance in relation to timeliness and completeness, as well as an analysis of the answers provided under the different sections of the reporting template, with the exception of section III on monitoring Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2.

16. Turning to a preliminary analysis of the reports available, the Committee noted that 17 out of the 40 reports due had been submitted before the meeting. While there were

differences in the quality of the reports, in general Parties had taken the reporting exercise seriously and had prepared extensive reports. It commented that the information provided was more detailed and comprehensive for those transboundary basins with an active commission. The Committee regretted that some Parties had not directly involved the existing transboundary commissions or their members in the reporting exercise. It highlighted that information on transboundary groundwater was less complete than for surface waters, and cooperation on transboundary groundwater appeared to be lagging behind. It was also regrettable that the overall analysis of the progress, achievements and challenges under section IV was rather limited.

17. The Committee made arrangements to analyse the Parties' reports and prepare the relevant chapter of its report to the Meeting of the Parties. In particular it agreed on the distribution of tasks and a timeline for the preparation of its analysis.

V. Promotion of the mechanism to facilitate and support implementation and compliance

18. As agreed at its last meeting, the Committee prepared a letter to be sent to non-governmental organizations to inform them of its existence and functions. It also put together a list of relevant non-governmental organizations to be addressed.

VI. Role of the Committee in the global opening of the Convention

19. The secretariat informed the Committee about the efforts undertaken to promote the Convention and to build capacity to accede to it and implement it in interested countries outside the ECE region. In particular, it reported on a national workshop on the Water Convention held on 29 and 30 March 2017 in N'djamena, Chad and the ensuing steps undertaken by Chad towards accession. The Democratic Republic of Congo had also requested that a national workshop on the Convention be organized. The secretariat furthermore reported on the support provided or planned to be provided to the Economic Community of Central African States and to the Economic Community of West African States in negotiating regional agreements on transboundary cooperation.

VII. Programme of work and calendar for the next meetings

20. The Committee decided that it would hold its next meeting on 8 and 9 March 2018 in Geneva, possibly back to back with the meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Protocol on Water and Health. The meeting would mostly focus on the finalization of the Committee's report to the Meeting of the Parties.

VIII. Closing of the meeting and adoption of the report

21. The Chair thanked the secretariat of the Finnish-Swedish Transboundary River Commission and Mr. Kinnunen for the warm hospitality extended to the Committee during the meeting.

22. The Committee entrusted the secretariat to prepare and circulate the draft report on its eighth meeting, which the Committee subsequently approved through electronic communication means.